

In the fourth stanza, the child rejoins "the first dead" : that is, her body has become part of eternity. She is now among the long friends (i.e. Worms). worms for Dylan Thomas are not disgusting but they are elements of decadence and thus of reunification, of eternity. The word 'friend' may be due to the function of the worms which eat the dead body hereby they hasten the process of decay and then the union of the body and nature to reach an existence beyond mortality ('The grains beyond age'). The child here embraces 'the dark veins of her mother,' (i.e. the earth). This is another reason why the child need not be mourned.

Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,  
 Robed in the long friends,  
 The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,  
 Secret by the unmourning water  
 Of the riding Thames.  
 After the first death, there, there is no death.<sup>(19)</sup>

To conclude, one may say that the essence of Thomas's rebellion against death lurks in his constant refusal to admit to it. There is neither rest nor peace in his vision of death; there is rather an alleluia of all the earth's potential energy which is presented in a pattern of mystical and surrealistic images.

#### NOTES

1. William T. Moynihan, *The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 157.
2. Dylan Thomas, *The Poems* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1989), p. 58.
3. E.W. Tedlock (ed.), *Dylan Thomas: The Legend and the poet* (London: Heinemann, 1963), p. 149.
4. Dylan Thomas, *The Poems*, p. 58.
5. Ibid., 207-208.
6. William Moynihan, *The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas*, p. 186.
7. Ibid., 295.
8. C. B. Cox (ed.), *Dylan Thomas: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 17.
9. Dylan Thomas, *The Poems*, p. 49.
10. William Moynihan, *The Craft and Art of Dylan Thomas*, p. 205.
11. Dylan Thomas, *The Poems*, p. 50.
12. Ibid., 192.
13. C.B. Cox, *Dylan Thomas*, p. 18.
14. Dylan Thomas, *The Poems*, p. 192.
15. John Ackerman, *Dylan Thomas: His Life and Work* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 117.
16. Ibid.
17. Dylan Thomas, *The Poems*, p. 192.

And the earth was without form, and void;  
 and darkness was upon the face of the deep ....  
 And God said, let there be light: and there  
 was light. And God saw the light, that it  
 was good: and God divided the light from  
 the darkness .... And God said, let there  
 be a firmament in the midst the waters.(16)

The poet protests and refuses to mourn the death of the child until the end of the world: and this end is seen as a return to the original darkness and chaos before God divided the light from the darkness, (i.e the original and natural spiritual union of things) .

This refusal to mourn the death of the child is not a blasphemy or an arrogant lack of feeling. In stanza three the poet gives the answer:

The majesty and burning of the child's death  
 I shall not murder  
 The mankind of her going with a grave truth  
 Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath  
 With any further  
 Elegy of innocence and youth.(17)

Her death is majestic and her going is mankind and that the death was a voyage 'down the stations of the breath' (like Christ's stations of crucifixion, the stages of her journey to destruction). One may conclude that death, according to Dylan Thomas, is just a means to reach the final spiritual union with nature and eternity. Accordingly, death does not frighten the poet. On the contrary, the poet refuses the pretended authority of death on man and his soul. This is not new with Dylan Thomas. John Donne handled the idea in his poem "Death be not Proud, though some have called thee".

Both poets believe that death presents no fear to them, for they believe that eternal life will destroy death. Donne describes death as a sleep which transfers man to another world of pleasure and happiness. He says once we are dead, we shall awake into eternity and so death shall be powerless and die. The only difference one may find in the two situations of John Donne and Dylan Thomas is that the former attacks death so violently and sardonically while the latter deals with it in more sophisticated and secular manner.

Though Dylan Thomas refuses to mourn this death, he does not forget his humanity. He does feel pity for the child's physical suffering and he is deeply moved by the "mankind of her going" and will not forget her humanity in the creation of an elegy. Such an elegy would be "a solemn benediction over the dead child".(18)

Instead of going ahead in developing this idea to reach a logical synthesis as a final product of the unity of man and nature, the poet breaks this continuity by concluding that "Though they be mad and dead as nails." Undoubtedly, nothing can be expected of a cold doornail which is fixed in an inanimate material. The discrepancy is obvious between the main fertile image of life in death and that of the 'nail'.

"A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of A Child in London, " is, perhaps, the best example of Thomas's rebellion against death. In this poem, Thomas is precisely successful in presenting the triumph of life over death. The poem develops through ritualistic tone and sacramental images. The paraphrasable meaning of the poem is simple enough: the poet says that he will never violate the meaning of the truth of the child's death by mourning because of the majesty of her death and because she has become one with the cycle of nature, she has been united with its eternal elements. Accordingly, he concludes his thesis by establishing the following synthesis:

After the first death, there is no other.<sup>(12)</sup>

One dies once and after the first death, there is no other death which can touch her now. The same theme is implicit in "And Death shall have no Dominion."

The opening line extends from the first to the thirteenth line, without intervening punctuation which represents a single sentence swelling out to a magnificent surge of meaning. Thomas says he will not mourn the child until the end of the world; and this end is presented in "darkness", "Silence", and the "still hour" which are caused by death.

Never until the mankind making  
Bird beast and flower  
Fathering and all humbling darkness  
Tells with silence the last light breaking  
And the still hour  
Is come of the sea tumbling in harness<sup>(14)</sup>

Darkness here is "fathering" both mankind and natural life "Bird beast and flower." These things will end and the poet will return to the spiritual union with the cycles of nature "Water bead, corn" in the second stanza. Darkness is referred to as 'fathering', since it is in darkness that all life emerges. "Likewise this darkness, which the generative sources of life share, makes all man and all forms of natural life similar in their origin: it is 'humbling!'"<sup>(15)</sup> This relationship between man and nature is demonstrated mainly in the pattern of images.

The biblical source of the imagery of light and darkness and of the sea is the opening chapter of Genesis 2-6:

exhorts his father to resist and reject dying and to express the value of life by raging against death. Whether his tears create a curse or a blessing on the poet in the last stanza of the poem, they should be better than this gentle dreadful silence. Silence to Dylan Thomas means death and sound means life. He shows his dread of silence most clearly in this poem, where the inability of his father to talk is the equivalent of death and nonentity. This end of man, anyway, is rejected by the poet.<sup>(7)</sup> His sorrow transcends ordinary grief and lamentation, showing more insight and enlightenment though man discovers that dark is right, yet he should not keep silent in facing death.

The paradoxes in the poem such as "dark is right," "blinding sight", and "curse, bless" are used skillfully by the poet to produce or to enhance the sense of rage. For instance, although they know well that after lightning of words or youth darkness will prevail, they have to rave and rebel against dying, and it must not be any submission.

In "And Death shall have no Dominion", Thomas comes to a realization that such destruction is no destruction, but immortality, and eternity<sup>(8)</sup>. This dominion over death is fulfilled by the oneness of man and nature:

Dead men naked they shall be one  
With the man in the wind and the west moon;<sup>(9)</sup>

Thomas here is not concerned with any spiritual aspect of man. The phrase "Death hath no dominion" is mentioned in St. Paul (Romans 6:9) which refers to the eternal life of the soul. The poet adapts the christian scripture for his own purpose which is far different from the traditional christian purpose. This poem has nothing to do with a soul, nor with the resurrection. It simply deals with "the scientific fact that matter cannot be destroyed."<sup>(10)</sup> This point is made clear at the end of the poem:

Though they be mad and dead as nails,  
Heads of the characters hammer through daises;  
Break in the sun till the sun breaks down,  
And death shall have no dominion.<sup>(11)</sup>

Death shall be defeated in the sense that a man may be dead and cold as a doornail but the matter of his body remains whatever shape it takes. This image of life in death is not productive for it deals with a unity of two motionless and inanimate elements. Dylan Thomas fails in his simile when he says in the first stanza:

Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again .

What happens in Dylan Thomas's poems of death is precisely different. Instead of relying on bare meditation and spiritual insight, Thomas uses the various elements of nature in a very logical association to reach his own mystical concept or attitude. However, both the conventional mystic and the poet nearly reach the same synthesis that once the body is dead, the soul lives for ever which is regarded as a triumph over death.

The rage against death reaches its climax in Thomas's poem 'Do not go Gentle into that Good Night'. It is that type of rage against the silent submission of man to death. The poem consists of six stanzas, the last line of each stanza emphasizes the recurring cry of rebellion against dying .

Do not go gentle into that good night ,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day ;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light .

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night .

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against dying of the light.<sup>(5)</sup>

This sadness is transformed into a cry of rage in the last line of each stanza which provides a link among the four dying men. Dylan Thomas says that wise men, good men, wild men, and grave men all find reason for sorrow or repentance at the time of death. They have either loved life too much or not enough.<sup>(6)</sup> But all men find the personal achievements of their lives unsatisfactory.

Undoubtedly, the occasion, as it is supposed to be at least, is of sadness and lamenation: the death of his father. Instead of being sunk in depression, Thomas

paradox that in springtime, which is supposed to be a time of vitality and fertility, stars float along the emptiness of space. And in the last line of the same stanza the spring bird is dying in summer. In other words, both spring and summer become seasons of death and absurdity. But the poet does not stop at this point of lamentation. Whether Thomas tries to ridicule death or to make it more acceptable, he makes things detached from their obvious and familiar characteristics. He addresses Winter as 'ornamental' season though it is usually described as the season of storms.

Winter is undoubtedly called so because of the snow and ice which form elegant patterns and because of the traditional decorations of Christmas. "Winter, thus, is comparatively given the sense of joy, re-creation and universal renewal rather than gloominess and melancholy which lead to a sort of despair so painful that it seems to threaten madness." Nature here, as Edith Sitwell argues, speaks through the poet himself.<sup>(3)</sup> Thus, life and light emerge from death and darkness. Nature speaks according to the child's purity and simplicity. The child tries to retain the vivid imaginative perception of winter and Christmas that belong to him. Man can no longer perceive winter with that peculiar kind of vividness that a child has, precisely because he is an adult and not a child. In short, spring and summer do not entertain him but they produce an awareness of immense distances, uncontrolled and uncertain movement, and the void. We find the poet is being attracted to the whiteness of the ice and the snow of Winter as any child does; it becomes a season of celebration, festivity and rejoicing.

In the third stanza, the worm and the cuckoo are associated in an interesting unity of opposites with an alienated sense of Spring.

I should tell summer from the trees, the worms  
Tell, if at all, the winter's storms  
Or the funeral of the sun;  
I should learn spring by the cuckooing,  
And the slug should teach me destruction<sup>(4)</sup>.

The worm and the sun symbolize decay which assist in the process of the corpus' decadence and thus of reunification with nature. Again, Spring here is detached from its conventional denotation. Spring is perceived by the behaviour of the cuckoo. Here, the cuckoo is a symbol of destructiveness, for the newly hatched cuckoo pushes the unhatched eggs out of its unknowing foster-parents' nest. It is a celebration of the melancholy of death presented as scientific facts in poetical expression to achieve a kind of mystical notion. This mystical notion does not deal with any hidden meaning or a mere spiritual power of the conventional mystic who tries to be united with God and, through that, to reach a truth beyond human understanding. The religious mysticism says that knowledge of God and of real truth may be reached through meditation or spiritual insight, independently of reason and the senses.

# The Sense of Death In Dylan Thomas's Poetry

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## Abstract

The study deals with Dylan Thomas's concept of death. The essence of his rebellion against it lurks in his constant refusal to admit to it. There is neither rest nor peace in his vision of death; there is rather an alleluia of all the earth's potential energy which is presented in a pattern of mystical and surrealistic images. Therefore, his philosophy of death is a paradoxical one. It is a mixture of both mystical reflection and scientific or material facts to reach an eternal world.

Dylan Thomas's philosophy of death is a paradoxical one. It is a mixture of both mystical reflection and scientific facts to reach an eternal world. Accordingly, one should not expect that poetry to Dylan Thomas simply means a garment with which one dresses one's emotion in order to create a song. To him the relationship between poetry and emotion is similar to that relationship between body and soul as one being, just as a man himself is created. His poetry becomes then a constant endeavor to explore the scientific and the mystical eternity of the soul and its connection with the external materialistic milieu (i.e. the body and nature). Hence the essence of Thomas's rebellion against death as a final station of the journey of man in life emerges as a constant debate of refusal, protesting and raging to admit to death or sometimes it is a cry of revulsion against dying.

Dylan Thomas himself suggests the direction and nature of his poetry replying to an enquiry in 1934 "My poetry is, or should be, useful to me for one reason : it is the record of my individual struggle from darkness towards some measure of light."<sup>(1)</sup> It is therefore a journey from darkness to light and from death to life which is a continuous exertion to find beauty, love and truth.

In "Here in this Spring", the poet faces us uncompromisingly and disturbingly with a picture of man confronting the void, with man as he comes across the threat of nothingness. That picture comes to us with startling clarity. The poet does more than describe the void; he involves us in it; he creates it for us. This achievement is the mark of Thomas's peculiar attention.

Here in this spring, stars float along the void ;  
Here in this ornamental winter  
Down pelts the naked weather ;  
This summer buries a spring bird.<sup>(2)</sup>

From the first line of the poem we are surprised to hear a very moving